

***Chionanthus retusus*** J. Lindley & J. Paxton  
(*Chionanthus chinensis*, *Chionanthus serrulatus*)

**Chinese Fringetree**

**Other Common Names:** Japanese Fringetree, Korean Fringetree.

**Family:** *Oleaceae*.

**Cold Hardiness:** Effective in USDA zones 6 (5b) through 9(10a).

**Foliage:** Tardily deciduous; opposite to subopposite; simple; nearly rounded, oblong-elliptic, to obovate; 2Oto 4Olong by  $\frac{3}{4}$ Oto 2Owide; tips bluntly acute to short acuminate, or sometimes with small notches in the tips; margins entire on mature plants, sometimes serrate on juvenile trees; bases cuneate to nearly rounded; mostly glabrous above, with a brown pubescence heaviest on the veins beneath; veins pinnate and very lightly impressed above, while being raised beneath; leathery textured and a handsome dark glossy green in summer; leaves held late into autumn or early winter; plants can develop an acceptable yellow fall color in cooler climates, while often managing no better than a yellow-green or brown in warm climates; the yellowish green petioles are  $\frac{1}{2}$ Oto 1Olong.

**Flower:** Polygamo-dioecious; flowers have four separate  $\frac{3}{4}$ Olong linear petals; numerous small fragrant white flowers are borne in showy terminal panicles, 2Oto 4Olong, in late spring to early summer; the panicles are more erect than with *C. virginicus*.

**Fruit:** Dark blue to blue-black  $\frac{1}{2}$ Olong drupe ripening in fall; fruits are mildly showy on some female plants; the fruit is scavenged by various species of wildlife; fruit may create a slight potential for litter on sidewalks and manicured lawns.

**Stem / Bark:** Stems — medium thickness to moderately stout; lenticels raised and orange-brown to gray-brown in color; stems initially green then brown to gray in color, eventually peeling to reveal green underbark on young limbs; exhibiting the slightly flattened appearance at the nodes of many members of the *Oleaceae*; Buds — conical; brown; divergent and setting more or less on a raised extension of the leaf scar; small,  $< \frac{1}{16}$ Oto nearly an  $\frac{1}{8}$ Olong; Bark — pealy light gray to gray-brown in color; bark becoming mildly ridged and furrowed on older trunks.

**Habit:** Chinese Fringetree is a large shrub to small tree, 15Nto 25N(40N) tall, with a rounded crown; plants tend to be multi-trunk unless trained to a single stem; trunk form is rather irregular; the overall texture is medium to slightly coarse.

**Cultural Requirements:** Although useful in full sun to partial shade, *C. retusus* benefits from afternoon shade and shelter from harsh winds in southern regions; this species is tolerant of a wide range of soil pH; plants are suited to soil moisture conditions range from moderately droughty to periodically wet; *Chionanthus retusus* is generally considered to be more tolerant of urban conditions than *C. virginicus*; this species is reported to be tolerant of air pollution.

**Pathological Problems:** Scale insects, leaf spots, and powdery mildew are occasional problems.

**Ornamental Assets:** Fantastic spring flowers are highly visible against the dark green leaves; the flowers, interesting form, clean summer foliage, and handsome bark make for a tree with multi-season interest; the yellow fall color can be attractive in cooler climates; plants tolerate a wide range of sites; the interesting stem architecture works well with night lighting.

**Limitations & Liabilities:** None of serious consequence in the landscape; double dormancy in the seeds and cutting propagation challenges are the biggest limitations; plants are slow growers.

**Landscape Utilization:** Specimen trees in highly visible locations; patio or deck areas; entryways; large planters; parking lot islands; nice when used as small street trees.

**Other Comments:** The genus name is derived from the two Greek words for snow and flower, while the specific epithet means notched on the tip in reference to the leaves of some genotypes.

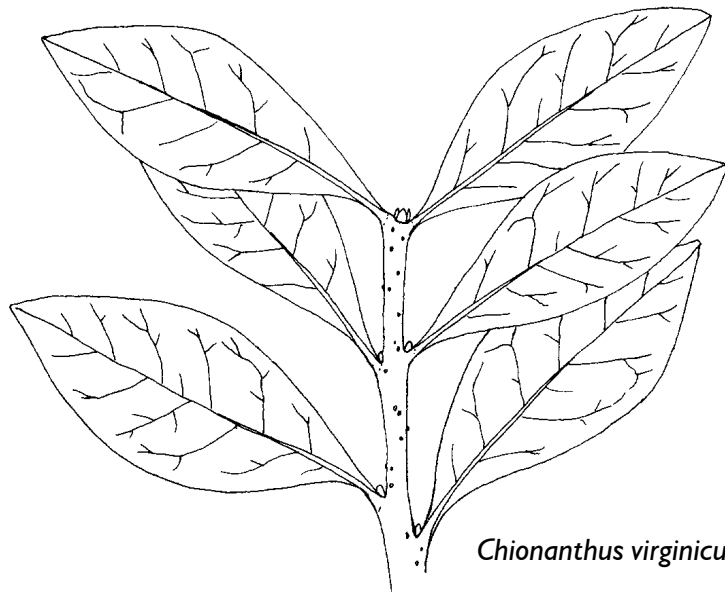
**Native Habitat:** China, Taiwan, Korea, and Japan.

**Related Taxa:** Few clonal selections are available in the trade as this species is difficult to root from cuttings; Mr. Mitch Goynes, a former graduate student, attempted to root approximately 2000 cuttings from a superior flowering selection made by Texas Cooperative Extension Specialist Dr. William Welch; of this number only six rooted.

***Chionanthus virginicus* L.**

**White Fringetree**

- C Also known as American Fringetree, Flowering Ash, Fringetree, Grandfather-Graybeard, Graybeard Tree, Old-Man's-Beard, Poison Ash, Shavings, Snowflower Tree, Sunflower Tree, or White Fringe; *Chionanthus virginicus* is typically a tardily deciduous large shrub to small tree, 10N to 15N(35N) tall; the canopy is often supported by several crooked trunks resulting in an irregular upright oval to rounded crown; if open grown, plants usually develop into more or less rounded large shrubs that remain limbed to the ground; plants tend to be slow growers.
- C The opposite to subopposite leaves are larger, up to 8" long, and less thick and duller green on *C. virginicus* than on *C. retusus*; although not often developing in our region, in cooler climates a good yellow fall color may occur; while handsome in flower, *C. virginicus* is not as striking as *C. retusus* in full bloom; the fragrant white blooms with strap-like petals occur in late spring or early summer and are most noticeable on staminate plants; flowering occurs prior to leaf emergence which is very late in the season on *C. virginicus*.
- C This species is tolerant of a variety of exposures from full sun to partial shade, but performs best with morning sun and shade during the heat of the day; once established, plants can tolerate moderate drought and periodically wet soils; chlorosis may develop on high pH soils; pathological problems can include scale or mite infestations and stem cankers; this species is useful over a wide range, USDA zones 3 to 9, with proper provenance selection.
- C Fringetree is native to the Eastern US, including East Texas; the specific epithet honors the state of Virginia; I remember learning of this species in my plant materials classes at The Ohio State University in the early 1980's and wondering why the plant was not more widely sold in the trade, this is still the case, perhaps due to propagation/production problems.



**References:** Dirr, 1998; Gilman, 1997; Poor, 1984; Tripp and Raulston, 1995; Vines, 1960; Wyman, 1965.

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